

Festive study: 'White Winter Hymnal'

KS3/4

Dice Wood

Introduction

In the lead-up to Christmas, there are a lot of pulls on a music department. Students want festive lessons, but staff are in full preparation mode with all the extra-curricular preparations for carol services and Christmas concerts, and so on. And we have a growing number of students who cannot, or do not want to, take part in Christmas-related activities.

Having back-up resources that require limited effort from teachers and yet create rich learning activities with opportunities for all is therefore the aim. 'White Winter Hymnal' is a lovely winter-themed piece with no religious connotations that can still easily be fitted into a carol service or Christmas concert if needed. The arrangement used for this resource is from Pentatonix (www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1odrRl3VQo) which has a cappella vocals and a fabulous body percussion accompaniment that gives lots of opportunities to explore musical features. This resource covers a wide range of activities across composing, performing and evaluating.

The suggestions that follow can be adapted to KS3 and KS4 lessons. Where possible, premade YouTube videos have been added. There is also a set of slides (<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JfCHRK6zGTxYN1sKsV-sly1aXKo4aHcJILDenUVZkRE/copy>) to accompany this resource that includes each of the activities detailed below, so that preparation work is at a minimum: you'll just need to adapt them to suit your own classes. As you click on the link it will ask you to make a copy. Once you've done that, you'll be able to adapt them without others overwriting your changes.

This is not designed as a series of structured lessons, but rather a group of activities that can be used pick 'n' mix-style to suit your classes. These have been split into three parts. The first looks at just the introduction, the second focuses on the main section of the piece, and the third looks at how 'White Winter Hymnal' can be used as inspiration for arranging and composing students' own work.

Each activity can be extended and built upon. They cover the three strands of music education – performance, composition and evaluation (including dictation) – and also make links to the elements of music. Key vocabulary that links to GCSE has been included in bold and can be introduced to classes during or after the practical activities. Early tasks introducing the ideas will be used quite similarly between both key stages, but ideas on where they can be adapted and extended are added where appropriate.

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KUNAWAT

Part 1: the introduction

Activity 1: performing in harmony

The opening to 'White Winter Hymnal' by Pentatonix is a build-up of harmonies over a heartbeat-style body percussion.

Introduce the pulse, which is chest body percussion:



Add the melody line 'I was following the':



Ask students to perform the heartbeat and the **ostinato** together at the same time.

Teach the other parts (pick and choose from below which work best for your classes):



Split the class into groups, and get them singing in **harmony** together, **a cappella**.

Of course, there are lots of opportunities here to discuss music notation if appropriate, particularly with KS4 students. You could ask them:

- ▶ What are the names of the two sharps in the key signature?
- ▶ What key is this in?
- ▶ What is the importance of the repeated note in the bass part? (Introducing the idea of a **pedal note**.)
- ▶ What does the 8 under the treble clef in the tenor part mean?

Extension activity: composition/evaluation skills

Ask students to discuss different ways we could use dynamics in the opening, and write them on the board. Also: what different tempos could be used?

As a class and in small groups, workshop/experiment with what happens to the mood of the piece when we change the dynamics and tempo. Perform to each other and discuss the moods created.

This links to the GCSE specifications, where students are expected to both identify and explain the compositional choices made to create mood. It can also help develop these areas in students' own compositions, which are often afterthoughts with priority given to melody and harmony!

Activity 2: rhythm dictation

Students gain a lot more confidence in reading notation if they can also write it. Therefore starting with small tasks little and often in KS3 can really help build toward GCSE dictation skills and empower students in their learning.

KS3

- 1 Clap the rhythm of the vocal ostinato 'I was following the'.
- 2 Give students the grid below, and ask them to add the lyrics that fall in each beat, then to add Xs on where they think they clap (add the word or the X later in the box if the word or clap doesn't fall on the beat).

	1	2	3	4
Lyrics	I			
Rhythm	X			

- 3 Get them to compare and check their answers:

	1	2	3	4
Lyrics	I	was	fol - low -	ing the
Rhythm	X	x	X x	X x

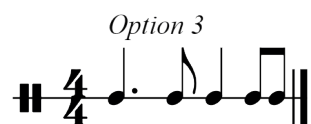
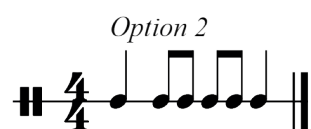
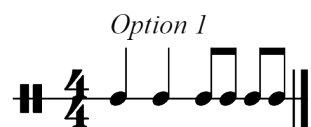
- 4 Get students to identify how many beats we have in the bar, and therefore how they would write the time signature. Then select the notation they think would fit. (If you've not already covered it, this is a great opportunity to introduce a dotted crotchet!)

KS4

There are two options here, depending on how early on in the GCSE course it is, and which exam board you're using. For both, get students to identify the metre of the piece. Then either:

- ▶ Give students different rhythms as below and get them to identify which one is correct, or
- ▶ Give them the first and last note of the rhythm and ask them to add in dictation of the other parts.

Multiple choice task:



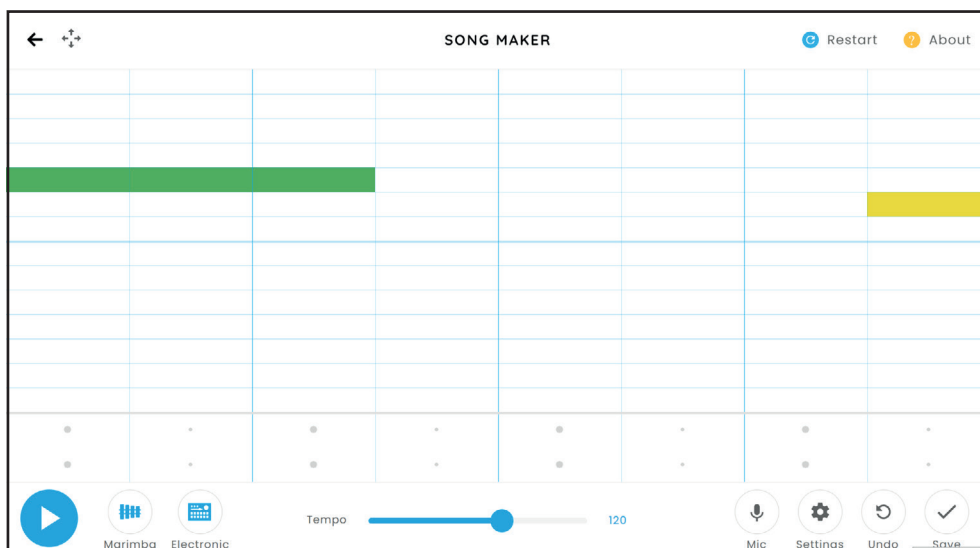
Dictation task with first and last note:



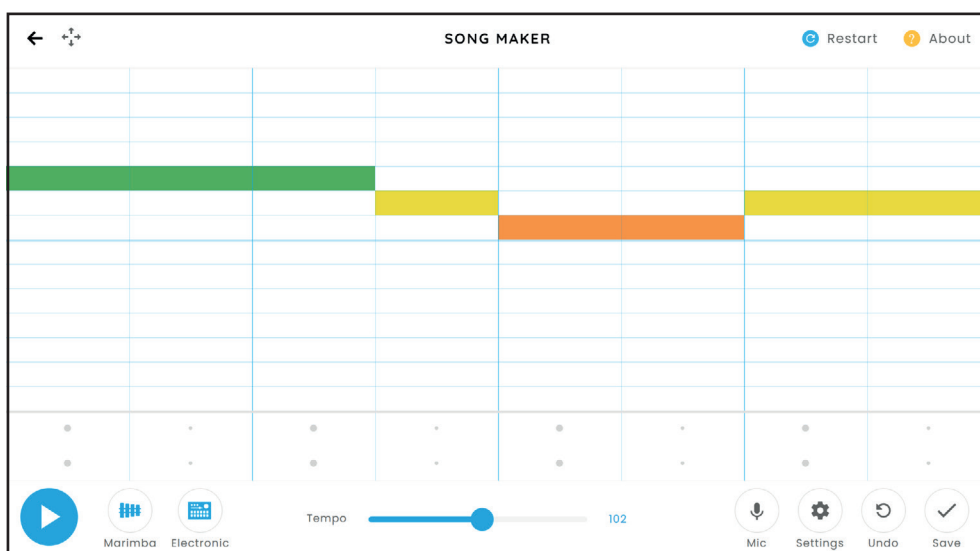
Activity 3: pitch and harmony

Students need to be able to identify whether **pitch** rises or falls. It also helps if they can start to identify **next-door notes or leaps** within a key. Chrome Music Lab's Song Maker (<https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Song-Maker>) is a really helpful tool for doing this without students worrying about five-line notation.

- 1 Give students this link (<https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Song-Maker/song/5103205221138432>), and ask them to see if they can work out the 'White Winter Hymnal' melodic line.

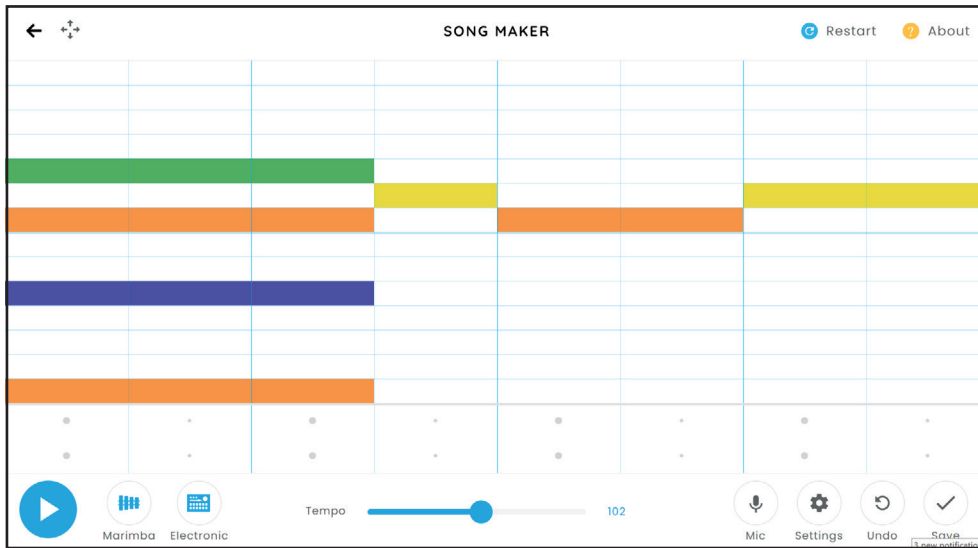


- 2 Allow students to check and adapt their answers based on the image below, then ask if they can add one of the other **ostinatos**. Is it higher or lower in pitch? Which note does it start on? These questions can be discussed as a class and added onto the board, then students can be given the freedom to work out the rest of the ostinato.

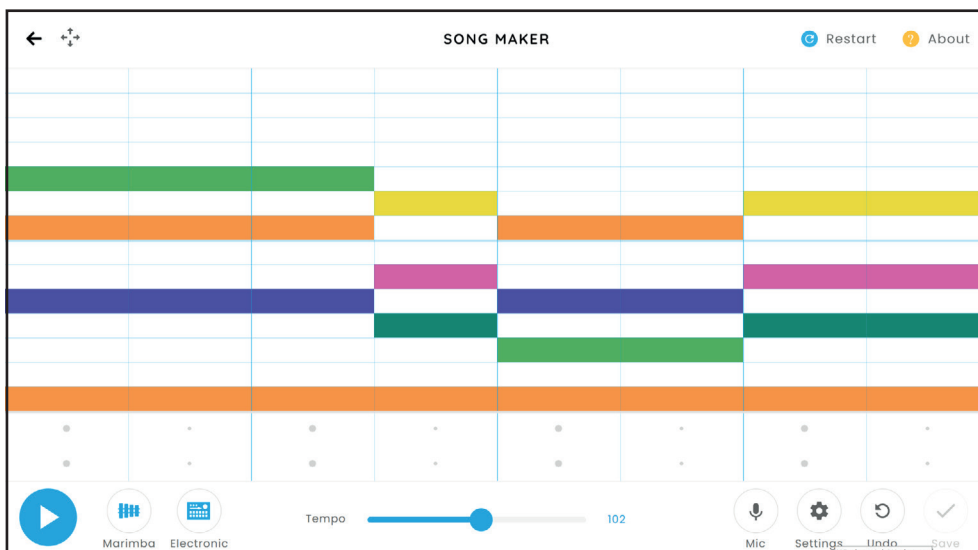


NB: Song Maker cannot produce one long, unbroken note, therefore the dotted crotchet has been put in as three boxes to give the full length, but it will be played three times by the program.

3 You can repeat this for all four ostinatos if appropriate (particularly with your KS4 classes), using this link: <https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Song-Maker/song/4844529105240064>



Answers for the completed version: <https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Song-Maker/song/6114940166078464>



- 4 Using the version linked above with all four parts in it, discuss the spacing *between* each of the melodic lines. Demonstrate what happens if we use blocks in notes next to each other, creating **dissonance**, and then move it back for **consonance**. Discuss the mood each of these create.
- 5 What happens if we change the **tonality**? Unfortunately Song Maker does not have a minor tonality setting, but playing it on the keyboard should allow students to gain an understanding. Again, discuss how this affects mood and impact of the piece.

KS4 students could go directly to stave pitch notation in this exercise if you feel it's appropriate for their current level of progress. Always give them the first and last notes to help guide them.

Activity 4: composing an opening vocal ostinato

The following activity can be differentiated by how you group students. For example:

- ▶ Lower KS3 could complete the activity in groups of three to four.
- ▶ Upper KS3 (Year 9) could complete this activity in pairs.
- ▶ Early KS4 could work in pairs, but ideally this should be completed individually with Year 11.

Compose an opening **ostinato** for a winter song that you can perform to the class. Use the lyrics below:

*A robin hops, hops, hops
Along the ground*

Extension activities:

- ▶ **Notate your rhythm/pitch** (this could include using Google Chrome Song Maker).
- ▶ Add **consonant harmony** to your ostinato.
- ▶ Experiment with different **dynamics** and **tempo** – which best fits the **mood** you're trying to create?

Part 2: main piece

Activity 1: structure

Students often give little thought to the **structure** of a piece. When composing, they create lots of ideas rather than learning how to recycle the core material they've created. Getting students to identify structure and where things are repeated or developed is an important skill to develop from Year 7 upwards.

KS3

Use a drag and drop activity: with the lyrics and descriptions in boxes, get students to drag the boxes into the order they hear them.

Asking students to notice the colour coding helps them to understand where repetition has been used, which can lead to a productive conversation about why repetition in music is necessary.

In the accompanying slides, a drag and drop opportunity has been provided, or you can adapt it to your own version.

KS4

Beside the lyrics, get students to drag and drop the names of the sections. These include Intro, A section, B section and Link.

Again, a slide with this activity is provided in the linked teaching resources.

Activity 2: vocal performance

- 1 Using the scores below, teach students to sing the melody line of the verse and the oohs.
- 2 Discuss the word setting used for creating the contrasting **syllabic** verses and the **melismatic** oohs.
- 3 Ask students to identify how Pentatonix keep listeners' interest when repeating the 'ooh' melody (adding **harmony** on the repeat).
- 4 Teach the harmonic part, and ask students if it's **consonant** or **dissonant**.
- 5 You can use this video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFSJoQwnV2g&t) to help students learn more of the harmonic parts, which would be particularly good for KS4 students looking at ensemble performance skills.

Section A:

I was fol-low-ing the pack all swal-lowed in their coats with scarves of red tied round their throats, to keep their lit-tle heads from fal-ling in the snow and I turned round and there you go! and Mi chael you would fall, and turn the white snow red as staw - ber - ries in the sum - mer time

Section B:

Soprano 2nd time only

Soprano

Ooh

Ooh

Alto

Ooh

Ooh

S.

Ooh

A.

Ooh

Activity 3: texture and rhythm

- 1 Using the video of Pentatonix performing (www.youtube.com/watch?v=01odrRI3VQo), ask students to identify the different **layers** in the **texture**, noticing both the **a cappella** vocals and the **body percussion** accompaniment.
- 2 Get students to sing through with the video to help revise and boost confidence in the melodic material.

KS3: body percussion

- 1 Ask groups to compose their own body percussion accompaniment. You could ask them to notate it (Midnight Music has created a free clip art library you can use: <https://midnightmusic.com/2020/12/midnight-musics-body-percussion-clipart-library/>).
- 2 See if they can both sing and perform the body percussion at the same time.

KS4: body percussion – ensemble performance skills

- 1 Split your class into five groups. Using the playlist created by the EHTHS vocal ensemble, ask each group to learn their body percussion part. Each video has a slowed-down and normal-speed version of the parts:
 - ▶ Bass 1: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTo4MjvyQ4o
 - ▶ Bass 2: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqwU2NC2JY8
 - ▶ Tenor: www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6pyp3j1ndo
 - ▶ Alto: www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_TgjpgazAM
 - ▶ Soprano: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs1m4WdWKCQ
 It will take some time and practice to get this together as a group, but it's a great opportunity to discuss ensemble rehearsal skills, and what's needed from each member of the group.
- 2 Get groups to perform together to the rest of the class, or in time with the original video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=01odrRI3VQo).
- 3 Discuss with students where stronger body percussion sounds are used versus the softer ones. Why have they made these decisions?
- 4 Discuss how body percussion keeps interest and avoids too much repetition.

Activity 4: composing body percussion

Taking another festive or winter song, compose your own body percussion to fit with it. If appropriate, you could ask students to create their own notated version using Midnight Music's clip art (<https://midnightmusic.com/2020/12/midnight-musics-body-percussion-clipart-library/>). Alternatively you could get them to create a video tutorial. This is a great activity for a cover lesson if they have access to a computer!

Activity 5: untuned percussion

Give students access to any untuned percussion you have in the department, and ask them to substitute a body percussion action for the same rhythm on an instrument. Then discuss these questions with them:

- ▶ Which instruments work better on a **strong beat**?
- ▶ How do percussion choices change the **mood** or **style** of the piece? Samba instruments will give a very different feel to tambourine and triangle, for example.
- ▶ Which percussion combinations go better together?

This is all about helping students make critical judgments about selecting an instrumentation that's appropriate – a key skill when completing KS4 composition work.

Activity 6: more untuned percussion

Take the body percussion that students composed for Activity 4, and add an untuned percussion element. Think about the use of **dynamics**: should they be steady throughout, or varied?

Part 3: using 'White Winter Hymnal' as the basis for composing and arranging

Activity 1: adapting MIDI

Using the MIDI files provided with this resource, ask students to import them into their DAW and create an instrumental version of the song in any genre they like,

It should have:

- ▶ a clear **structure**.
- ▶ contrasting parts.
- ▶ a percussive line.

As an extension, encourage students to create their own additional parts, for example keeping the main melody but creating their own new harmonies.

Activity 2: composing a winter song

This activity can be completed as a whole-class workshop, in groups or pairs at KS3, and even individually at KS4.

Taking one verse of lyrics:

- ▶ Create a melody line using two chords: CEG and GBD.
- ▶ Add a percussion part.
- ▶ Think about tempo, dynamics and the mood/style you're trying to create.

In the resources a set of lyrics has been provided with chords over the top, but these can be adapted to your own.

Extension tasks:

- ▶ Add vocal harmonic lines by using the other notes in the chords.
- ▶ Add instrumental parts (these can be live or through your DAW).
- ▶ Add structure by adding any of the following: an introduction, a contrasting section, an outro.

Evaluating compositions

Listen to each other's compositions and discuss:

- ▶ What **style** of music are they composed in?
- ▶ What **mood** have they created?
- ▶ How do the **elements of music** help create this mood?
- ▶ What could be improved on?

The last question above is a real opportunity with KS4 to workshop composition skills, and particularly how to develop material.

Final thoughts: taking it further

There are so many opportunities to develop the skills students learn from each of these activities, and link them to other areas of their learning, extending that to enrichment opportunities outside of the classroom. Below are some ideas for how you could do this:

- ▶ Include a performance of 'White Winter Hymnal' in your school concert. For example, have Year 7 singing the introduction and the main melody, have Years 8 and 9 adding harmonies, and get your GCSE class to provide the body percussion.
- ▶ Give opportunities for successful winter compositions created by your students to be performed in your end-of-term concert, celebrating students' composing skills.
- ▶ The sequenced arrangements and compositions could easily be created into a playlist shared via your school newsletter for parents to hear what students been working on. It can also be used as entry/exit music for assemblies right through January/February time.
- ▶ Develop the winter song composition activity into a wider songwriting course with KS4, which could then be use towards a 'free choice' composition (if appropriate for your examination board).
- ▶ If a performance is completed in small groups with one person per part, it could be used for ensemble performance at KS4 (if appropriate for your examination board).

There are so many opportunities for using 'White Winter Hymnal' in the classroom, and of course many of these activities can easily be adapted to other winter songs too, fitting in with your curriculum across KS3 and 4.